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FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS STAFF

PROGRAM Nightline

STATION WJLA TV
ABC Network

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SUBJECT Abuses of Power and Official Secrets Laws

TED KOPPEL: Good evening. I'm Ted Koppel, and this is Nightline.

The charge is abuse of power in cases that range from illegal government wire taps to outright violence. But the TV documentary that makes those charges can't even be seen in England, the country where the abuses allegedly take place, because it may violate Britain's Official Secrets Act. There are those who say we need similar national security laws in this country.

It is a complaint common to all U. S. administrations in modern times: too many leaks of too much classified information to too many reporters. If only, one sometimes hears government officials complaining wistfully -- if only we had what the British have, an Official Secrets Act.

A little later in this broadcast we'll hear from a former CIA official who takes that position and from a New York Times' columnist, who, not surprisingly, rejects it. But first, a look at how that Official Secrets Act is applied. You're about to see part of a British documentary which was produced for broadcast in Great Britain, but has never been aired because the television network was advised by its lawyers that transmission would have constituted a criminal act.

Nightline correspondent Jeff Greenfield will explain what the controversy is about:

NARRATOR: Every democratic society needs a police force. It also needs security services. In this country we